4:Phillips E-4,5 (1956-1957) 1966
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relationships: within the family, usually in terms of the relative ages of people; elsewhere, in terms of age, wealth, power, knowledge, religious or governmental role. Secondly, they are based on the assumption that every individual, regardless of his position in the hierarchy, deserves respect. The first is a respect associated with the proper performance of one's role; the second, a recognition of the essential dignity of every human being.

The role of these respect patterns cannot be emphasized enough. Benedict, in her study (1946) of Thai culture at a distance, referred to the learning of the *waj*, or gesture of obeisance, as "the first teaching the child receives." Although the *waj* is perhaps not the very first social act the child learns, I have seen infants no more than two weeks old being guided by the mother in raising the palms of their little hands to the forehead in expression of deference to superiors. The older infant who can do this on his own almost always receives acknowledgments of approval and delight from the adults in attendance. An older sibling really means it when he says of his relationship with his younger brothers, "when I ask them to do some kind of work, they go and do it. They never disobey, and when there is no disobedience, there is no hatred. . . . Formerly, whenever there was entertainment somewhere I took them with me. My younger siblings love me a lot. . . ." His position in the authority structure assumes the respect of those younger than he, and they willingly grant it for, among other things, he plays his role well as the kindly superior who takes them with him whenever there is entertainment. All the polite little linguistic forms (honorifics, expletives suggesting status and, most important, ordinary kinship terminology with its specification of relative age) as well as kinesthetic forms (lowering the body while passing a seated older person, holding the younger between one's legs and with arms around him in a position of protection) also serve to emphasize the respect that people grant one another because of their differential status. Perhaps the most revealing illustration of the strength of these patterns, at least the authority pattern, was provided by a two-year-old toddler who pointed to the stomach of his pregnant mother and said with pride, "My younger sibling is in there. When he is born he will be *my* responsibility." Little doubt that when the child is born he will give his older brother his due.

With regard to the other respect form, recognizing the dignity of every human being, more than once I have heard parents say that they disliked giving their child a certain medicine "because it offends the baby; he does not like it. It is better not to give it to him than to hurt his feelings." Although I do not doubt that in some instances the parents were annoyed more by the screams of the child than anything else, I am also convinced that for the most part they were respecting his basic individuality and right

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4. The good person is one who tries to behave in an honest way.
5. Do not shove anything at anybody or throw anything at anybody.
6. Do not make loud noises when people are working.
7. Do not spit or clear your phlegm or yawn in public.
8. Do not gobble your food or scatter things on your plate or chew loudly.
9. Do not sit or walk carelessly or abruptly against other people.
10. Do not touch or horse-play with people who are your close friends.
11. If you are a superior, wherever you go, you should look after the comfort of your inferior.

Again, although the list is almost self-explanatory, note should be taken of some cultural emphases that run through several of the items: the stress on behaving properly toward superordinates and subordinates; the emphasis upon motoric and emotional self-discipline, and conversely, the implicit fear of losing control over one's impulses (as indicated in the dictum against horseplay, even with one's friends); the general stress of respecting the inviolability of every person; and finally, the great emphasis on the importance of the body in human behavior and social relationships. Although this last point may not seem unusual, in that the dicta are addressed to children—with whom one would expect much concern over the body—it in fact represents an area about which all Thai regardless of age are sensitive. In general Siamese, considerably more than Occidentals, tend to be aware of physical bearing, beauty, and ugliness, as well as the use of the body as a communicative device. A person's physical appearance is an indication of his character, particularly his moral nature, and kinesthetic modes are explicitly used for conveying love, regard, and as suggested above, disrespect.[9]

It is worth reëmphasizing that the above items are standards for, not descriptions of, behavior. The attention given to controlling body movements is simply to emphasize for the child that people will decide whether he is good or bad on the basis of the way he handles his body, and he must therefore exercise extreme care in its use. Items one, nine, and ten are not meant to imply anything fundamentally wrong with touching another. Most Thai, particularly members of the same sex, thoroughly enjoy expressing their mutual affection through bodily contact: by holding hands, grasping the leg or arm of the other, and in Bang Chan, sometimes by sleeping with one another. In the last instance, there is absolutely no sexual contact; often during the cold season the practice serves not only friendship but the additional purpose of keeping the participants warm.

[9] Although it belongs to a different area of behavior, it is not insignificant that in classical Thai dance every body movement—the configuration of the hands, the position of the legs, eye movements—has a specific, conventionalized meaning. In the oldest, or Khon, version of the dance, the only means of communication other than that provided by masks are body movements.

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*128 achievement, and dependency, or by discussing those traits which are significant in the daily round of life, irrespective of the analytic categories to which they refer. In this section we will emphasize the latter, more naturalistic approach. Its advantage is that it permits us to identify and develop certain issues which play a crucial role in the interactive world of the villagers, but which might otherwise go unnoticed should they not be represented by, or not quite fit, any of the predetermined categories. The Thai attitudes toward the body referred to earlier, for example, is an issue of extreme importance in their interpersonal relationships, but one that is actually given little explicit attention in most personality studies. This section is designed in part to deal with such problems, although inevitably there may be some overlap between the materials covered here and those discussed in later sections.

The Pleasures of Social Contact

*156 159 Of all the personality traits that come to the attention of the foreign observer there is perhaps none more compelling than the affability, gentleness, and good humor of the villagers. It is difficult to think of a people more consistently ready, *once contact has been made,* to treat others amicably and convivially than the peasants of Bang Chan. (The italics are necessary simply because the villagers are equally primed to ignore others.) However, this jovial cordiality is not an easy thing to conceptualize. In the earlier paper by Hanks and Phillips (1961) we spoke of these happy characteristics as "not so much the expressions of any basic lightheartedness as they are techniques for implementing the main precept of social interaction: 'Avoid face-to-face conflict!'" Although the villagers' good humor does serve this purpose, I would now suggest that it involves several additional dimensions and motives.

571 First, there is a whole complex of responses represented here. The tendency to keep situations and conversations jocular, amusing, and at times gently ribald, is perhaps the most relaxed expression of this attitude. It is most obvious in the behavior of village gossip groups and in the relationships between individuals who consider themselves acquaintances but not quite close friends. The essential ingredient of this mode of affability is that interaction should be a great deal of fun but of little social consequence. Of a different order, and more common, is the villagers' ubiquitous politeness. [574] This takes a host of forms: the genial hospitality that is expressed toward a newcomer, usually in the form of "personal" questions serving both to [576] identify the person and to make him feel that others are interested in him ("How old are you? Any children? How much did you pay for your shirt or your land? Why don't you have any children?"); the numerous linguistic

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and postural forms expressive of respect cited earlier; the repeated hesitation to place others in embarrassing situations; the hesitation to tell others bad news so that "they will not feel sad" or will not have to dissemble (although more often the less delicate reason is the person's fear of embarrassing himself). Of a still different order is the uneasy affability that is expressed in the nervous giggling accompanying many face-to-face relationships and in the compulsive preoccupation with inconsequential or inoffensive topics while conversing with others. These responses appear to be either attempts to maintain minimal contact with others while jockeying to find out what they are really up to, or, in the negative sense, efforts to fulfill the minimum requirements of interaction while waiting (and hoping) for the contact to come to an end. And still different from all these is the affability associated with trying to make a good impression on others expressed in the constant concern with displaying good manners, with using pleasing or flattering words, with being a good host, and the like. Although this category is in many respects behaviorally similar to the "politeness" referred to above, it seems to differ from the latter motivationally in that it is concerned not with the state and comfort of others *per se*, but with ego's effect on others.

As described above in simple summary terms, these responses might appear quite ordinary and at certain times applicable to any group of human beings. However, what impresses the observer in Bang Chan is the insistence and constancy of their use. These are precisely the forms that the villagers choose in the vast majority of situations for expressing the degree and quality of contact that they feel toward others. That they are in fact social forms—stylized, often ritualized, modes of behaving—should not be overlooked. It is just this characteristic that engenders the theme underlying all the responses and which indeed sets the tone of most Thai interaction: that the relations between people should be friendly, genial, and correct, but need have little personal commitment or involvement. As will be seen below, it is this readiness to phrase most face-to-face contact in terms of social rituals while at the same time feeling little commitment to others that actually lies at the root of what has so often been called Thailand's "loosely structured social system."

Social Play

The first response mentioned above, the tendency to turn social situations into occasions for play, is probably one of the most common of all human tendencies (it is certainly one of the earliest), but one that strangely has received little attention in the psychological literature. The few writers who have expressed any interest in social play have tended to view it simply

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609 Of the various forms politeness takes, its most relaxed, least contrived
574 form in the cordiality that villagers extend to newcomers. Strangers to Bang Chan are hardly swept off their feet, but once contact has been established, they are welcomed with a degree of attention far exceeding simple tolerance of their presence. People express a curious interest in them as individuals, as if somehow their presence were adding a new dimension to the lives of their hosts. In the case of many Bang Chaners, this is probably true: the lives of these villagers are sufficiently routine and insular that the appearance of a new face is identified also with the advent of a significant and new experience. Still other villagers approach the newcomer with an attitude that says in effect: "One should try to meet and know as many persons as possible. Who knows what good may come of it?" The implied meaning here is that the cursory contact may in time develop into a firm relationship of reciprocal rights and obligations, whereby person A could turn to B to borrow money, ask his help in finding a job, help sponsor his son's ordination, and vice versa. There is in this attitude a sense of gentle optimism combined with opportunism. And still other villagers, probably the majority, approach the newcomer with no self reference at all, but with the simple intention of trying to make him feel comfortable. Whatever the intention in each case, however, the dominant behavior exhibited to the newcomer is openness, amiability, and curiosity.

• 576 The actual expressions of conviviality are at all times simple and
574 straightforward. They involve asking the person such questions as his age,
521 place of birth, whether he is married, or whether he has yet served in the
609 monkhood. (Notice the phrasing of this last question. The polite Thai form is never whether a person has been a monk or not, but rather whether he has already been a monk or not *yet* become one. The syntax of the interrogative form assumes the good intentions of the other person.) If the individual is identified as coming from a locale with special or distinguishing characteristics, the conversation will often involve humorous allusions to the place. For example, if he is from the North, there will most likely be joking references to the beautiful women of Chiengmai; if he is from the Northeast, to the funny accent of the people of that area. If the relative statuses of visitor and host can be quickly identified (based upon age, clothes, speech patterns, and occasionally surname), the conversation may turn to topics whose very purpose is to emphasize status considerations and thus make the participants more comfortable with one another. If they

*156 difficulties (ask his father to save the family land for him; tell the aunt he did not
159 want to marry the girl she had chosen—which he could have done had he felt secure about his relatives' love for him), he politely said nothing. The net result of all of this, as indicated in the text, was a deep sense of personal inadequacy and resentment that loved ones cannot be depended on. Further, Dang had begun to treat others as he felt others had treated him.

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are social peers, the Bang Chaners would easily turn the conversation to a discussion of the technical aspects of rice farming or even gambling. The latter would likely be discussed with a social superior only after some acquaintance. On the other hand, if one were clearly the other's superior, the superior would probably talk not about the methods of rice farming but, more generally and benignly, inquire, "Is all going well with you? Is there any way I might help you?" He might even proffer some unsolicited advice or aid. The tone and theme of the conversation would be expressive largely of the superior's concern with the welfare of his new-found friend, which the latter would typically accept.

All this is usually accompanied by gentle laughter and careful attention to appropriate pronominal forms. The good host will also serve his guest rain water, and if possible, scented rain water. If opportunity and finances permit, he may even offer him a warm Coca-Cola. The youngster who will actually serve the refreshment will make sure that it is on a coaster and that his hands are in the proper ritual position when he offers the drink to the guest. Such are the ingredients from which potential friendships are made.

Although the particulars of the kind of politeness found among family and friends are different from the above, the forms are essentially the same. Villagers do not talk about the funny accents of the people who live next door to them, nor do they rush to serve scented water when a brother comes to call. But they do take pains to express respect for each other by using proper honorific and pronominal forms, by looking to the oldest competent family member for advice, by talking of subjects that are pleasant and amusing, but never threatening or embarrassing.

The avoidance of embarrassing topics—even when the airing of such topics may be crucially important or beneficial to one of the parties concerned—is one of the most pronounced facets of village social life. To a Westerner accustomed to outspokenness, the types of situations that villagers define as embarrassing and the lengths to which they will go to avoid them sometimes appear to border on the sado-masochistic. Detailed interviews with two women whose husbands had taken second wives, for example, indicate that although at the time they were deeply disturbed by their husbands' actions (primarily for economic reasons; secondarily for emotional-sexual ones) they never once even brought the subject up with their husbands. They explained that they were too *ʔaaj* (embarrassed) to do so. In neither case was this embarrassment expressive of any feeling of inadequacy on their parts (the fear of hearing their husbands say, "I took a second wife because you are not adequate"). It was prompted rather by the desire to avoid an awkward and potentially rancorous confrontation. They did not want to put anybody on the spot. (Whether such a confrontation would *actually* lead to overt rancor is almost impossible to ascertain because